

TITLE 92 - NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHAPTER - REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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001 General Provisions.

001.01 Statutory Authority. This Chapter is adopted pursuant to Sections 79-318, 79-305, 79-703, 79-757 through 79-760.01 and 79-1601 of the Revised Statutes of Nebraska (R.R.S.).

001.02 Scope and Application of this Chapter. This Chapter contains provisions regarding the accreditation of schools, pursuant to Subsection (4) of Section 79-703 R.R.S. (Public schools; education programs in state institutions that house juveniles; approval and accreditation standards; accreditation committee; duties; legislative intent.), which is carried out through a school system review process.

001.02A With the exception of a private, denominational, or parochial school, referred to herein as a non-public school, which elects not to meet the accreditation requirements of this Chapter, as may be permitted pursuant to Section 79-318 R.R.S. (State Board of Education; powers; duties.) and subsections (2) through (6) of 79-1601 R.R.S. (Private, denominational, or parochial schools, teachers, and other individuals; laws applicable; election not to meet accreditation or approval requirements.), a school system in Nebraska that provides elementary and/or secondary instruction to children of compulsory attendance age shall be accredited under the provisions of this Chapter.

001.02B An Interim-program school subject to 92 NAC 18 (Interim-Program Schools in County Detention Homes, Institutions, and Juvenile Emergency Shelters) may seek accreditation under the provisions of this Chapter. If the head administrator of any such school elects to request accreditation by the Board under this Chapter, the Department may agree to modifications of accreditation requirements (004 Accreditation Requirements) to the extent such modifications are necessary to address unique attributes of an Interim-program school.

001.03 Purpose. The purpose of this Chapter is to establish accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards) and accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements) for the accreditation of school systems, using the AQuESTT framework approved by the Board to ensure continuous improvement by systems of both equality of opportunity and quality of programs offered within schools.

001.04 Implementation of this Chapter. This rule takes effect at the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year, with provisions to support the transition from prior requirements established in 92 NAC 10 (Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools), as follows:

001.04A On or before July 1, 2022, the Board may assign an accredited school system a transitional cycle of accreditation to cover the period between accreditation cycle presented in the 5-year external evaluation schedule (2020-21 External Visitation Schedule for State Accredited Schools – Framework), and the cycle of accreditation to be assigned in accordance with Section 006.03A of this Chapter.

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001.04B Beginning July 1, 2022, the Board will no longer issue annual accreditation decisions, except as may be needed at the conclusion of a school system's 1-year probationary cycle of accreditation. Accreditation will remain in effect through the assigned cycle of accreditation unless such cycle is later modified by the Board.

001.05 Related Regulations. In addition to the requirements of this Chapter, a public school system must also comply with procedures for enrollment of students as found in 92 NAC 3 (Regulations Governing High Ability Learners); 92 NAC 15 (Regulations and Procedures for English Learner Programs in Nebraska Public Schools); 92 NAC 19 (Regulations Regarding School Enrollment); 92 NAC 47 (Regulations for Career Academy Programs Established by School Districts); and 92 NAC 51 (Regulations and Standards for Special Education Programs). Provisions applicable to both public and nonpublic schools include 92 NAC 21 (Regulations for the Issuance of Certificates and Permits to Teach, Provide Special Services, and Administer in Nebraska Schools); 92 NAC 24 (Regulations for Certificate Endorsements); 92 NAC __ (Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of School Systems); 92 NAC __ (Regulations and Procedures for School and District Accountability); and 92 NAC 59 (Regulations for School Health and Safety).

001.06 Additional materials not inconsistent with these rules. The Department may issue, and update as appropriate, policy directives, guidance documents, operational memoranda, administrative regulations, forms, and tools to guide application of accreditation standards and the implementation of this Chapter, consistent with the promulgated rules and regulations. Any such materials will be made widely available for access by school systems and the public.

002 Definitions. As used in this Chapter:

002.01 Accreditation Requirements means the actions necessary for a school system to demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards).

002.02 Accreditation Cycle means a period of time, between 1 and 7 years, specified by the Board, within which a school system must successfully complete accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements), demonstrating full adherence with accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards) in order to have accreditation renewed by the Board.

002.03 Accreditation Standards means the expectations (Section 003 Accreditation Standards) that a school system and each school the system operates must meet to determine a cycle of accreditation. Accreditation standards are focused on meeting continuous improvement expectations and are focused on evidence-based practices.

002.04 AQuESTT (Accountability for a Quality Education System Today and Tomorrow) means a framework for approval, accreditation, and accountability. The AQuESTT framework consists of three broad domains that exist in quality education systems:

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1. Leadership
2. Success, Access, and Support to include the following tenets:
 - a. Educational Opportunities and Access;
 - b. Transitions; and
 - c. Positive Partnerships, Relationships, and Student Success.
3. Teaching, Learning, and Serving to include the following tenets:
 - a. Educator Effectiveness;
 - b. Student Achievement and Growth; and
 - c. Postsecondary, Career, and Civic Readiness.

002.05 Board means the State Board of Education.

002.06 Commissioner means the State Commissioner of Education.

002.07 Comprehensive Needs Assessment means a Department developed evidence-based instrument which focuses on quality education practices for student success. This self-assessment is to assist the school in determining current practices, areas of strength, and to identify priority areas for improvement.

002.08 Continuous Improvement (and Continuous Improvement Process) means systematic, ongoing instructional improvement processes at either the system, or building level that unfold progressively; that do not have a fixed or predetermined end point; and that are sustained over extended periods of time. Continuous improvement also encompasses the general belief that improvement is not something that starts and stops but is something that requires an organization and professional commitment to an ongoing process of learning, self-reflection, adaptation, and growth, and is ultimately focused on improving student achievement.

002.9 Continuous Improvement Committee means a representative group of school staff that includes, but is not limited to, administration, instructional staff, classified staff, parents and community members; assembled at the system level and, as needed, at the school level.

002.10 Corrective Action Plan means a systematic procedure timeline for resolving areas of needed improvement during a probationary cycle of accreditation.

002.11 Department means the State Department of Education, which is comprised of the Board and the Commissioner.

002.12 Governing Body means the school board or board of education of a public school district, a board elected or appointed to provide direction to a nonpublic school or a nonpublic school system, or an individual or corporate owner.

002.13 Nonpublic School means a private, denominational, or parochial school.

002.14 On-Site Evaluation means an on-site peer review of artifacts and system resources which is highly integrated with the annual requirements for continuous improvement.

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002.15 On-Site Evaluation Team means a team of experienced educators and administrators assembled to conduct an accreditation on-site evaluation. The size, composition, and qualifications of the team members will be determined through planning and preparation by the school system continuous improvement committee and the team lead assigned by the Department.

002.16 Perceptual Survey means instruments used to assess needs, answer questions, solve problems, establish baselines, and/or select goals. Perceptual surveys pose questions about what the respondent thinks or feels about given elements of the school culture, climate, safety, communication, and instruction.

002.17 Regional Accreditation means accreditation of systems that have been approved by an accreditation body of regional scope, which have been recognized by the Department, based on prescribed accreditation criteria and standards and a peer evaluation process or a performance-based review process. School systems that pursue regional accreditation shall also maintain the process set forth in this Chapter.

002.18 School means an individual attendance center within a school system which provides either elementary, middle, secondary, or high school education.

002.19 School District means the territory under the jurisdiction of a single public school board as defined in Section 79-101(1) R.R.S. (Terms, defined.).

002.20 School System means a public school district or a nonpublic school or group of nonpublic schools under a governing body organized to provide education in elementary, middle, secondary, and/or high school grades.

002.21 Student Achievement means evidence of student gains on measures of academic achievement (such as formative and summative assessment data, coursework, instructor observations) and elements perceived to influence those gains (such as student attendance, student engagement and time on task, and similar information), all of which are used to provide a well-rounded picture of school district and school performance.

002.22 Student Growth means improvement compared to the same individual's performance in the previous year.

003 Accreditation Standards.

Accreditation standards emanate from the AQuESTT (Accountability for a Quality Education System Today and Tomorrow) domains and tenets, without expanding or altering them. A school system's adherence to accreditation standards is evaluated in accordance with Section 004 (Accreditation Requirements) of this Chapter.

003.01 Leadership. The AQuESTT framework includes Leadership as one of three domains. Accreditation standards related to the Leadership domain shall be as follows:

003.01A Vision. Strong leaders, committed to achieving educational equity, are critical to the processes of approval, accreditation, accountability, and continuous

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improvement. Leaders, from school boards to superintendents, principals to teacher leaders, set a vision for achieving educational equity, offering students meaningful access to the educational resources they need at the right moment, at the right level, and with the right intensity to not only reach high expectations for learning, but also to discover and explore their passions and make meaningful connections within the context of their postsecondary interests, careers, and civic lives.

003.01B Knowledge, Skills, and Mindset. Leaders must possess the knowledge, skills, and mindset to systematize equity.

003.02 Success, Access, and Support. The AQuESTT framework includes Success, Access, and Support as one of three domains. Accreditation standards related to the Success, Access, and Support domain shall be as follows:

003.02A Educational Opportunities and Access. Each student has access to effective, comprehensive, and continuous learning opportunities that prepare them for ongoing school success, postsecondary education, and career goals.

003.02B Transitions. Quality educational opportunities focus on effective supports and high-quality collaborations for each student transitioning within, into, and between grade levels, programs, schools, districts, postsecondary education, and careers.

003.02C Positive Partnerships, Relationships, and Success. Schools and districts implement best practices in student, family, and community engagement to enhance experiences and opportunities that are culturally inclusive and relevant for each student. Student success and engagement relies on positive partnerships and relationships to fundamentally improve the outcomes for each student, school, district, and community.

003.03 Teaching, Learning, and Serving. The AQuESTT framework includes Teaching, Learning, and Serving as one of three domains. Accreditation standards related to the Teaching, Learning, and Serving domain shall be as follows:

003.03A Educator Effectiveness. Each student is engaged by effective educators throughout their learning experiences, such that schools and districts develop effective teachers and school leaders who establish a culture of success.

003.03B Student Achievement and Growth. A balanced assessment system that includes results from multiple sources is used to measure student growth and achievement towards Nebraska's content and standards. A balanced assessment system is a necessary component of the instructional process to improve learning and growth for each student.

003.03C Postsecondary, Career, and Civic Readiness. Each student, upon high school graduation, is prepared for success in postsecondary education, career, and life pursuits.

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004 Accreditation Requirements.

004.01 Demonstration of Continuous Improvement. A school system is accredited on the basis of its development and ongoing implementation of a systemic, continuous school improvement process to promote quality learning for all students, as determined through state monitoring and evaluation, at both the system and school levels, for adherence to accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards) and the requirements enumerated in this part (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements).

004.02 Accreditation Procedures. The Department develops and implements procedures necessary to monitor and evaluate school system adherence to accreditation standards and accreditation requirements, including but not limited to quality learning, equity, and accountability, as well as the effectiveness of implementation of continuous improvement goals and action plans of the school system and each attendance center and school operated by the school system.

004.03 Prerequisites. Prior to requesting accreditation by the Board, including an initial request or affirmation of accreditation, a school system shall:

004.03A Receive and maintain approval pursuant to Section ____ of 92 NAC ____ (Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of Schools) for the legal operation of each school operated by the system.

004.03B Adhere to all applicable provisions of 92 NAC ____ (Regulations and Procedures for School System and School Accountability).

004.03C Obtain support and guidance from the governing body of the system for such request.

004.03D Establish and maintain a committee, which may be the system's continuous improvement committee, involving representatives of staff, educators, and administrators designated to participate directly in design and implementation of a continuous improvement process as a foundation for accreditation.

004.04 Continuous Improvement Process. A school system, including but not limited to the governing body, shall ensure and support each school's development and implementation of a continuous school improvement process focused on improving student learning to meet local and statewide goals and priorities. At both school and systems levels, the process includes a periodic on-site evaluation as described in Section 003 (Accreditation Standards) of this Chapter, and the following:

004.04A Development of continuous improvement goals, in which not less than one goal is directed toward improving student academic achievement and one goal selected from the results of the comprehensive needs assessment;

004.04B Development and systematic implementation of the continuous improvement action plan which includes procedures, strategies, actions to achieve goals, and an aligned professional development plan;

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004.04C Routine analysis of data which includes student achievement profiles, demographic subgroup performance, perceptual surveys, instructional observations, and/or post-graduate responses; and

004.04D Routine monitoring of progress toward improvement goals.

004.05 On-Site Evaluation. A school system, even if awarded regional accreditation, shall undergo a Department-led on-site evaluation review during the final year of the assigned accreditation cycle, and prior to June 30 of that year. The duration and agenda for an on-site evaluation shall be designed taking into account the total student enrollment of the school system and the number of schools operated by the system, providing for at least one full school day of evaluation-related activities. The on-site evaluation shall be carried out in accordance with the following:

004.05A The size, composition, and qualifications of the on-site evaluation team shall be developed by the system's continuous improvement committee in partnership with the on-site evaluation team leader assigned by the Department.

004.05B Prior to commencement of the on-site evaluation, the Department shall provide the school system with a roster of team members, a checklist of materials and required data that shall be used during the on-site evaluation.

004.05C The on-site evaluation team shall review system- and school-level compliance with accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards) and accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements), through a review of artifacts and processes, as well as discussions and observations, to include the school system's identification of areas of need from analysis of student academic achievement and growth data; continuous improvement goals and strategies; action plan progress; use of progress data to inform changes in strategy and resource allocation, as needed; and supporting documentation.

004.05D During the on-site evaluation, system and school personnel shall make provisions for adequate consultation time between on-site evaluation team members, and with faculty, administrative staff, and students.

004.05E At the conclusion of the on-site evaluation, the on-site evaluation team leader shall conduct an exit interview with the system's superintendent or head administrator and members of the continuous improvement committee. The interview shall include initial findings for commendations and areas for growth developed by the on-site visit consultations and corresponding data.

004.05F The on-site evaluation team shall prepare a written report that identifies specific strengths observed and areas for growth related to the accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards), and other related regulations (Section 001.04 Related Regulations).

004.05G The on-site evaluation team leader shall send the team's report to the school system head administrator not longer than 14 days after the conclusion of

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the on-site evaluation. Not longer than 7 days after receipt of the report, the head administrator shall acknowledge receipt and make it available for review by the governing body. The head administrator may submit the school system's written response to the Department within 7 days of receipt of the report.

004.05H The on-site evaluation team leader shall submit the team's evaluation reports, all related materials, and the response of the head administrator or governing body, if any, to the Commissioner or the Commissioner's designee.

005 Review by the Department.

The Department shall review the submission made by an on-site evaluation team leader and prepare a summary of findings regarding the system's adherence to accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards), accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements), and other related regulations (Section 001.04 Related Regulations).

006 Action by the State Accreditation Committee.

006.01 At least annually, the Commissioner or Commissioner's designee shall charge the state accreditation committee with the review of on-site evaluation reports from on-site evaluations conducted during the year. Such review shall include the Department's summary of findings regarding each on-site evaluation, statements of commendations, and recommendations.

006.01A The state accreditation committee, appointed by the Commissioner pursuant to Section 79-703 R.R.S. (Public schools; education programs in state institutions that house juveniles; approval and accreditation standards; accreditation committee; duties; legislative intent.), has duties including making recommendations to the Commissioner, on a schedule reflective of school system cycles of accreditation, regarding the accreditation of schools based on a review of each system and each school operated by the school system.

006.02 At the conclusion of its review, the state accreditation committee submits its findings, including any commendations, and recommendations to the Commissioner.

007 Action by the Department.

007.01 Review by the Commissioner. The Commissioner or Commissioner's designee shall review all findings and recommendations of the state accreditation committee regarding the accreditation of school systems, and may also consider the on-site evaluation report, findings of the Department, and any additional information and data maintained by the Department, including but not limited to the school system's approval assurance statement, program monitoring reports, complaints made against the system, and accountability system data.

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007.02 Recommendations of the Commissioner. Prior to the end of each school system's cycle of accreditation, the Commissioner or Commissioner's designee shall recommend the Board take action from among the following:

007.02A Approve or, for a school system already accredited, affirm accreditation;

007.02B Approve or, for a school system already accredited, affirm accreditation with a probationary cycle of accreditation, if the school system has not adhered to all accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements)

007.02C Revoke accreditation if a school system assigned a probationary cycle of accreditation has not demonstrated full adherence to all accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements) before the end of the probationary cycle.

007.03 Action by the Board.

007.03A After considering recommendations of the Commissioner, the Board shall approve accreditation of a school system or, if the school system is already accredited, affirm accreditation. Any decision of the Board to approve or affirm accreditation shall prescribe a corresponding cycle of accreditation in accordance with the following:

007.03A1 A five (5) or seven (7) year cycle of accreditation, if the school system meets accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements) and also demonstrates through strong evidence of systemwide use of a comprehensive model of continuous improvement, with the longer cycle of accreditation reserved for those school systems found to exceed accreditation standards (Section 003 Accreditation Standards) in multiple areas;

007.03A2 A three (3) year cycle of accreditation, if the school system meets all accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements), yet lacks strong evidence of systemwide use of a comprehensive model of continuous improvement; or at the request of the local governing body;

007.03A3 A one (1) year cycle of accreditation, which shall be designated a probationary cycle of accreditation, if the school system fails to fully comply with the accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements).

007.03A3a In assigning a probationary cycle of accreditation, the Board shall establish a timeline by which the system's superintendent or head administrator of the system is required to submit to the department a plan for achieving full compliance with

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this Chapter. Such plan shall be developed with appropriate consideration of the continuous improvement plan and process, and input from the governing body. Actions identified in the plan shall be taken within the probationary cycle of accreditation and progress reported to the governing body and Department no later than at the conclusion of the year of the probationary cycle of accreditation.

007.03B After considering recommendations of the Commissioner, the Board may revoke accreditation of a school system that does not demonstrate full compliance with accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements) at the end of a probationary cycle of accreditation.

007.03C At any time, the Board may modify the cycle of accreditation assigned to a school system. A shorter cycle of accreditation may be prescribed in response to evidence of noncompliance with accreditation requirements (Section 004 Accreditation Requirements) or lacks strong evidence of systemwide use of a comprehensive model of continuous improvement or a pattern of noncompliance with approval regulations (92 NAC __ (Regulations and Procedures for the Approval of School Systems)).

007.04 Certificate of Accreditation. Following a decision by the Board to approve or affirm accreditation, the Department shall issue a certificate of accreditation to the school system, including specification of the assigned cycle of accreditation.